THE HERO OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS

Heresy in the Heartland

C. I. Scofield: Scoundrel, Shyster, and Scalawag

This colorful rogue is best known today as the editor of a best-selling reference Bible. But when his name appeared in newspapers across the nation after he presided over Dwight L. Moody's funeral in 1899, some Kansas communities took the news as insult added to injury. They remembered how C.I. Scofield, then a lawyer and corrupt government official, had skipped town years before, leaving his creditors in the lurch. When news got around that Scofield had become a minister of the gospel, some of these Kansans pressed him for restitution. According to an article in the *Kansas City Journal*, "Parson Scofield declared that he is poor and unable to pay."

Indeed, in her 2011 thesis, D. Jean Rushing reports that this antipathy toward Scofield had diminished but little one hundred years later: In contrast, the Atchison, Kansas community still remembered Mr. Scofield's reputation as a "scalawag" and his abandonment of his family over a century later. In 1989, Joseph M. Canfield offered his newly published biography *The Incredible Scofield and His Book* to the Atchison Public Library. The library declined Canfield's offer with the reply "I don't think we need his biography. Many Atchison citizens remember what a rascal he was." *("From Confederate Deserter to Decorated Veteran Bible Scholar: Exploring the Enigmatic Life of C.I. Scofield1861-1921")*

Early History

Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (sometimes misspelled "Schofield) was born in Michigan in 1843. His mother died three months later. Cyrus had several older sisters and was living in Tennessee with one of them when the Civil War broke out. Though only seventeen, young Cy enlisted in the Confederate Army by falsifying his age. His unit saw action in Virginia and Cy had plenty of time to reconsider. After a stay in a Richmond hospital, Cy wrote to the Confederate Secretary of War requesting a discharge because a) he was a minor, b) he was a Northerner, and c) he was in poor health. In September of 1862, Cy was given a certificate of discharge stating he was "an alien friend" of the Confederacy.

What happened next is a mystery. According to some accounts he was later conscripted and deserted to the North where he took an oath of allegiance to the Union. Scofield himself later told a version of the story in which he served to the end of the war (and received the Southern Cross of Honor for bravery displayed at Antietam). In any event, he eventually made his way to St. Louis to live with another sister.

Cyrus' sister Emmaline (also Emeline) had married Sylvester Papin, the son of a prominent French family in St. Louis. Papin, a lawyer, worked for the City Assessor's office and when his young brother-in-law escaped the war, Papin let him apprentice there. And so Cyrus Scofield began his legal education, specializing in issues of property: land grants, titles, and deeds.

Several wealthy and influential French Creole families had tight cultural and financial connections in St. Louis society. The Papins formed part of this circle, as did the widowed Helene LeBeau Cerre, whose daughter caught the eye of young Cyrus Scofield. In 1866, with a dispensation from the Church, eighteen-year-old Leontine Cerre and the non-Catholic Cyrus Scofield were wed in a civil ceremony. Two daughters arrived in quick succession, and were dutifully baptized at churches in Missouri. Abigail was named after Cyrus' mother, and Helene was christened after Leontine's.

Kansas Experience

As Cyrus advanced his legal education, Sylvester Papin sent him across the state line to represent the family in a land grant case. The Scofields, with Leontine's brother Henry, moved to Atchison, Kansas. (Maintaining the lifestyle they had enjoyed in St. Louis, the family had live-in servants, including a ten-year-old black female.) Cyrus continued to make contacts in the political world, catching the attention of prominent politician John J. Ingalls, who sponsored his application to practice law in the state.

Kansas politics was a rough-and-tumble world in those years, riddled with corruption and investigations, but Scofield waded right in and rose to fame quickly. The adaptive young man was elected twice to the **Kansas House of Representatives**, though from different districts each time. A son, Guy Sylvester, joined the Scofield family in 1872. The next year, Scofield helped John Ingalls get elected to the U.S. Senate. A week after taking his seat in the Senate, Ingalls returned the favor by getting the 29-year-old Scofield appointed **U.S. District Attorney for Kansas**. Scofield took the oath of office, swearing that he had "never voluntarily borne arms against the United States".

In December 1873, just six months into his new job, Scofield was forced to resign in a cloud of scandal and corruption that involved blackmail, bribery, and possibly embezzlement. Disgraced and in debt, he forged Ingalls' name "to secure funds for himself", a choice that severed that partnership for good. Cyrus and Leontine returned to Missouri with their girls and baby Guy. They were still living with his sister Emmaline, now a wealthy widow, when Guy died of scarlet fever. They buried the toddler in St. Louis in December 1974. After attempts to get legal work in St. Louis came to naught (he was never admitted to the bar in Missouri), Cyrus abandoned his wife and young daughters. By his own account, he had also become a heavy drinker.

Leontine took her little girls back to Kansas. Her mother moved in with them and Leontine went to work: first in a milliner's shop, and later at the public library where she worked for many years. Leontine was known in the community as a cultured woman and a good mother. She raised her daughters as Roman Catholics.

Scofield the Scoundrel

For the next several years, Cyrus was nothing more than a rogue and a scoundrel. In Missouri, he obtained money by forging his sister's name. But he could be far more creative.

In Milwaukee, C.I. Scofield assumed the alias "Charles Ingerson". Posing as a well-heeled cotton plantation owner from Mobile, Alabama, he checked into the Metropolitan Hotel and courted the attentions of a local young beauty–until his landlord had him arrested for vagrancy. Days later he was released, after sweet-talking his unsuspecting fiancee into paying his hotel bill. Two weeks later, he was re-arrested, but this time the young lady's resources were exhausted.

While C.I. was up to no good in Wisconsin, Leontine obtained a legal separation from him in Kansas. The marriage would drag on another six years on paper, with Leontine never getting a penny of support from her husband. At one point, C.I. wrote to Leontine, offering to invest $1300 on behalf of his mother-in-law. He must have been convincing, for Leontine sent him the money. C.I. dutifully sent back documents signed by a fictitious Charles Best. The whole "investment" turned out to be a fraud and the story later made it into the newspapers.

In late 1878, "Cyrus Ingerson" aka "Charles Ingerson" was arrested and jailed in Wisconsin by request of the the St. Louis Chief of Police, who came to personally escort the con-man back to jail in St. Louis to face charges of forgery. Scofield spent six months in jail that time.

Religious Conversion

In November of 1879, the case against Scofield was dismissed. Emmaline paid off some of his debts. And C.I. Scofield found a new shtick: evangelicalism. Details of his religious conversion are unclear, as there are multiple reported accounts. Some mention his time in jail while others credit a client of his [non-existent] law office with introducing him to Jesus. We know that **Dwight L. Moody** conducted a preaching crusade in St. Louis at that time and Scofield participated. And so began a lifelong partnership. Scofield got involved with Moody's St. Louis YMCA, joined a Congregational church, and quickly obtained a preaching license from the Congregational church association.

His preacher friends drilled Scofield in the latest Protestant Biblical interpretations, particularly those of Anglo-Irish preacher John Nelson Darby. Darby, an ex-lawyer and ex-priest whose radical ideas had started the Plymouth Brethren in the United Kingdom, had visited St. Louis several years previous, spreading his understanding of "dispensations",and prophecy in the Bible. Today Darby is credited with inventing the doctrine of "the Rapture", the idea that Christian believers will suddenly be swept up to heaven ahead of "the Tribulation". With little exposure to alternate points of view, Scofield became a zealous advocate of these new-found and unconventional truths. In no time at all, the recently-converted lawyer was pastoring a church of his own.

In 1881, Leontine Scofield filed for divorce, declaring C.I. an unfit parent. Her now-Protestant husband fought for dismissal, and denied "each and every allegation" in Leontine's petition. When word got back to Kansas that the infamous lawyer was now preaching the gospel, the people he had once represented took his wife's side. The *Atchison Globe* reported in June of 1881: "*C. I. Schofield, who was appointed United States District Attorney for Kansas in 1873, and who turned out worse than any other Kansas official, is now a Campbellite preacher in Missouri. His wife and two children live in Atchison. He contributes nothing to their support except good advice.*"

Later that summer, a gossip column in an Atchison paper was also picked up by the *Topeka Daily Journal*:

Cyrus I. Schofield, formerly of Kansas, late lawyer, politician and shyster generally, has come to the surface again, and promises once more to gather around himself that halo of notoriety that has made him so prominent in the past. The last personal knowledge that Kansans have had of this peer among scalawags, was when about four years ago, after a series of forgeries and confidence games he left the state and a destitute family and took refuge in Canada. For a time he kept undercover, nothing being heard of him until within the past two years when he turned up in St. Louis, where he had a wealthy widowed sister living who has generally come to the front and squared up Cyrus' little follies and foibles by paying good round sums of money. Within the past year, however, Cyrus committed a

series of St. Louis forgeries that could not be settled so easily, and the erratic young gentleman was compelled to linger in the St. Louis jail for a period of six months.

Among the many malicious acts that characterized his career, was one peculiarly atrocious, that has come under our personal notice. Shortly after he left Kansas, leaving his wife and two children dependent upon the bounty of his wife's mother, he wrote his wife that he could invest some $1,300 of her mother's money, all she had, in a manner that would return big interest. After some correspondence he forwarded them a mortgage, signed and executed by one Chas. Best, purporting to convey valuable property in St. Louis. Upon this, the money was sent to him. Afterwards the mortgages were found to be base forgeries, no such person as Charles Best being in existence, and the property conveyed in the mortgage fictitious…*Among the many malicious acts that characterized his career, was one peculiarly atrocious, that has come under our personal notice. Shortly after he left Kansas, leaving his wife and two children dependent upon the bounty of his wife's mother, he wrote his wife that he could invest some $1,300 of her mother's money, all she had, in a manner that would return big interest. After some correspondence he forwarded them a mortgage, signed and executed by one Chas. Best, purporting to convey valuable property in St. Louis. Upon this, the money was sent to him. Afterwards the mortgages were found to be base forgeries, no such person as Charles Best being in existence, and the property conveyed in the mortgage fictitious…In the latter part of his confinement, Schofield, under the administration of certain influences, became converted, or professedly so. After this change of heart his wealthy sister came forward and paid his way out by settling the forgeries, and the next we hear of him he is ordained as a minister of the Congregational church, and under the chaperonage of Rev. Goodell, one of the most celebrated divines of St. Louis, he causes a most decided sensation. …Schofield represent[ed] first that his wife had obtained a decree of divorce. When the falsity of this story was ascertained by inquiries of our district clerk, he started on another that a divorce would be obtained, that he loved his children better than his life, but that the incompatibility of his wife's temper and her religious zeal in the Catholic church was such that he could not possibly live with her.A representative of the Patriot met Mrs. Schofield today, and that little lady denies, as absurd, such stories. There was never any domestic clouds in their homes. They always lived harmoniously and pleasant. As to her religion, she was no more zealous than any other church member. She attended service on the sabbath, and tried to live as becomes a Christian woman and mother. It was the first time she had ever heard the objection raised by him. As to supporting herself and the children, he has done nothing, said the little woman. Once in a great while, say every few months, he sends the children about $5, never more. "I am employed with A. L. de Gignac & Co., and work for their support and mine. As soon as Mr. Schofield settles something on the children to aid me in supporting them and giving them an education, I will gladly give him the matrimonial liberty he desires. I care not who he marries, or when, but I do want him to aid me in giving our little daughters the support and education they should have."* (*Topeka Daily Journal*, August 27, 1881)

On to Texas

This article did not apparently circulate as far as the Texas newspapers. In 1883, C.I. Scofield was invited to pastor **First Congregational Church** (now renamed Scofield Memorial Church) in **Dallas**, Texas. In Dallas, he was ordained by a regional church association. After meeting church member Hettie (van) Wart(z), C.I. also decided to wrap up his divorce from Leontine, who had again filed for divorce. He had apparently changed his own definition of marriage, concluding that a marriage between a Catholic (pagan, as far as he was concerned) and a Protestant was not a Christian marriage, anyway. This time he agreed to let Leontine have full custody, but she had to give up all claim to child support or alimony.

Hettie was also from Michigan, where she had attended teacher's college at Michigan State Normal School in Ypsilanti. Hettie's father had died years earlier, but her mother had married a domineering older man who was both physically and verbally abusive to his new wife and stepdaughters, to the point of threatening their lives. Three months after C.I.'s divorce from Leontine was finalized, he and Hettie were wed. After three years in Texas, Hettie's mother returned to Michigan and won a divorce suit against her horrid husband. Hettie gave birth to a son, Noel Paul Scofield, in Michigan in 1888.

In 1886, Scofield hosted Moody's Dallas crusade. And he became a speaker in the Bible conference movement. Two years later, he published a treatise on premillenial dispensational theology. Later, his teaching on "dispensationalism" and a "pre-trib" ("any-minute") rapture would be disseminated across North America as notes in his famous reference Bible. Some of Scofield's views on the "end times" would one day form a theological justification for Tim LaHaye's popular *Left Behind* series as well as the Religious Right's support of American Zionism.

After meeting Hudson Taylor, famed missionary to China, C.I. Scofield founded the **Central American Mission** (later **CAM International**, now **Camino Global)** which began by sending a missionary couple to Costa Rica in 1890. He also helped start Lake Charles College in Lousiana. And he offered a Bible Correspondence Course which was later taken over by **Moody Bible Institute**. Today, Moody still offers certificates in the Scofield Bible curriculum.

Professional Bible Teacher

In 1895, Scofield moved to Moody's Massachusetts headquarters to direct the **Northfield Bible Training School** for a while. He also pastored Moody's church in Northfield. According to Scofield, he himself educated Moody on the subject of Bible prophecy. Never having studied Biblical languages, Scofield relied on a Greek lexicon for personal study. By then he was styling himself the "**Rev. C.I. Scofield, D.D.**", though he had never attended college in his life and there is no record of any institution conferring on him even an honorary degree.

Scofield presided at **Dwight Moody's funeral** in 1899. After that, he divided his time between Dallas, Michigan, travel abroad, his property in New Hampshire, and New York City, where he maintained membership in the exclusive **Lotos Club**, a very secular association with the aim of promoting the arts and "learned professions". When he was in Dallas, Scofield was active in the local organization of Confederate veterans, and was sometimes called on to give addresses extolling the virtue and faith of Confederate heroes. As Scofield played up his experience in the ranks (and kept quiet about his Yankee origins), the Dallas community soon accepted the popular Bible teacher as a "Confederate soldier and in every respect a distinctly Southern man in his sentiments".

By the time Scofield left Massachusetts, he was already planning a new edition of the Bible, with extensive interpretive notes of his own– the first study Bible of its type. Ardent evangelical premillenialist Lyman Stewart, president of **Union Oil** and sponsor of the series ***The Fundamentals***, provided financial backing for Scofield's undertaking. Even with Hettie's assistance, the project took several years and numerous trips abroad for research and collaboration with scholars at Oxford. Some even credit Scofield with coining the term "Judeo-Christian" during this period; its first usage dates to approximately 1899.

Oxford University Press published the first **Scofield Reference Bible** in 1909. Scofield and his editors made revisions for the 1917 edition. One of these was the inclusion of suggested dates for Biblical events, including James Ussher's placement of Creation around

4004 BC. Scofield's note suggesting there could have been an indeterminate chronological "gap" between the events related in the first two verses of Genesis puts him at odds with modern fundamentalist believers.

Scofield's Legacy

For the last two decades of Scofield's life, he was a mentor for fellow lay theologian and Moody supporter Lewis Sperry Chafer, with whom he founded the **Philadelphia School of the Bible**. When Scofield's health declined (rumors swirled among his colleagues that Scofield abused prescription alcohol), Chafer replaced him in the pulpit in Dallas and went on to found **Dallas Theological Seminary.**

Scofield was estranged from all three of his children by the time of his death. His estate passed to both Hettie and Noel, with no mention of the daughters from his first marriage. **Noel Scofield** lived in New York until his death in 1962 and held the copyright to his father's Bible after his father's death. Noel refused to give interviews regarding his father and had no later involvement with the Dispensational movement.

Abigail and Helen Scofield both became teachers. Abigail taught at an elementary school, while her sister taught French at a girls' school in Kansas City. Abigail married Edward Kellogg, a dentist, in 1902. They later moved to California for Edward's health. There Abigail worked as a librarian and was popular in her community. Helen also married, but neither sister had children. When their father's reference Bible was published, the Catholic women who were his daughters received copies as "tokens of his love". Though they received no acknowledgement in his official biography in 1920, Scofield did maintain a correspondence with his adult daughters.

Leontine referred to herself as a widow after her divorce. She retired from the library in 1916 and passed away in 1936; her grave is in the Mt. Calvary Catholic cemetery in Atchison, Kansas. After Helen's husband died in 1941, Abigail, also widowed by then, returned to Kansas where the sisters lived together until their deaths in consecutive months in 1958.

Meanwhile, the annotated Scofield Reference Bible became a bestseller. Dispensational fundamentalism's favorite Bible remains in print today, having undergone many updates and revisions over the decades. Scofield's Bible notes strongly influenced the life and worldview of Jerry Falwell, who later guided the American religious right.

Volumes have been written about the numerous discrepancies in Scofield's official biography, written by Charles Trumbull. Biographer Joseph Canfield, who was raised under the strong influence of Scofield, Moody,and Darby and eventually came to view Dispensationalism as a cult, called attention to many of these discrepancies in his work, which he tried to donate to the Atchison Public Library, as we have seen.

Throughout his life, Cyrus I. Scofield proved a resilient and adaptive man who not lack for ambition. His temperament allowed him to always keep moving forward, undeterred by and unchained to past errors. Whatever else, he was, Scofield was a self-made, and frequently re-made, man.

"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house,

he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

1 Timothy 5:8